

BOBCAT STATUS IN IOWA

Prior to settlement, bobcats were found throughout Iowa. Historically they were the most abundant of Iowa's three native cat species - the bobcat, lynx and mountain lion. By the late 1800s historical records mention little of bobcats in Iowa.

In the 1930's and 1940's small numbers of bobcats were reported in all corners of Iowa, although they were most numerous in the northeast corner of the state. Between the 1940's and mid-1980's bobcats were infrequent in the western, southern and eastern portions of Iowa.

During the past decade and a half a number of bobcat sightings, roadkills, and occasional trapped bobcats have occurred. In 1999, Pat Schlarbaum, DNR Wildlife Diversity Technician, mailed out an informal questionnaire to County Conservation Boards across the state.

In early 2001 a second, more detailed questionnaire, was sent to a larger sample of outdoor professionals. Figure 13.1 shows that 71 counties now have known bobcats present within their boundaries. Several other counties probably have bobcats present but they have not been officially confirmed. Thus far, in 2003, the only new county with known bobcat presence is Linn County. Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri show similar bobcat expansion and increases near Iowa's southern and western borders.

Dr. Larkin Powell, Biology professor at the University of Nebraska (formerly of Loras College of Dubuque), has been working with an Honor's student to develop a bobcat habitat model for Iowa. We are anxious for that report but he has not provided it to us to date.

Dr. Jim Pease, Extension Wildlife

Specialist at Iowa State University, is also working with graduate student, Anne Avery, on a more elaborate survey of bobcat sightings and the public's perception of predators in the state. Her M.S. thesis should be completed by September, 2003.

The Iowa DNR currently plans to delist the bobcat from threatened status by September 2003.

Reproductive and population age structure data is being collected from all bobcat carcasses obtained from road killed and incidentally trapped animals. We will continue to monitor the increase and modern day expansion of bobcats in Iowa. I would predict that if the bobcat population continues to expand and increase in numbers, some portions of all Iowa counties could have bobcats present within the next 5 years.

The Iowa DNR is currently conducting a research study to monitor bobcat movements, habitat use and demographics in south-central Iowa. A small sample of bobcats will be captured and neck collared with GPS and standard radio tracking devices during 2003. After evaluating the success of this effort, the project will be expanded, over the next few years. An ISU graduate student, under Dr. Bill Clark, will be involved with the study beginning in the fall of 2003. Two bobcats have been collared with a GPS and standard radio, respectively.

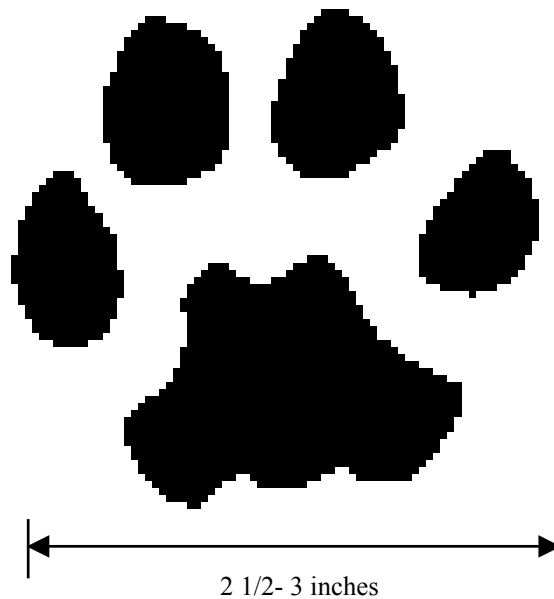
The bobcat population increase and expansion has been phenomenal during the last 15 years. Iowa's bobcat population is healthy enough to delist from its current threatened status. When

delisted the bobcat will still be protected with a closed season for a few years. Additional study and research should tell when the bobcat population is high enough to sustain a regulated harvest season. Be assured that such a harvest will be closely monitored to allow for a healthy, sustainable bobcat population to remain in Iowa. If I were to predict when a potential harvest season might occur, given the current rate and expansion of the bobcat population, it would not be before 2006 or 2007.

Two websites to help with identification of bobcat tracks, listen to a bobcat growl, and a wealth of other information are: <http://www.bear-tracker.com/bobcat.html> and <http://www.geocities.com/Yosemite/9152/bobcat-trackers.html>.

Must reading for all interested in wildlife:

Dinsmore, James J. 1994. A country so full of game, the story of wildlife in Iowa. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City. Pp. 249.



16.1. Iowa counties with Bobcat sightings.

